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RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 3564  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC  
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 3625  
RHMCSUU/CDR USCENCOM MACDILL AFB FL  
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RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC  
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC  
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SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/CEN, SCA/PPD, ECA

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SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: MEJLIS COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION, SCIENCE, AND  
CULTURE GRAPPLES WITH HUGE REFORM MANDATE

¶1. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for public Internet.

¶2. (SBU) SUMMARY: Post's PAO had a friendly and open meeting with the Chair of the Mejlis (Parliament) committee on Education, Science, and Culture. The discussion revealed that the committee has a massive portfolio of issues, but with a mandate from the Turkmen President to draft new legislation. Chairman Vladimir Gubanov previously served in the Ministry of Education where he was one of Post's more open contacts. Hopefully, Gubanov will be approved for an Open World visit to the United States in October 2009. END SUMMARY.

¶3. (SBU) On May 27, PAO met with the Chair and Deputy Chair of the Mejlis Committee on Education, Science, and Culture, which also covers environmental protection, sports, tourism, youth policy, mass media and publishing. The Chair is Vladimir Gubanov, who until the most recent parliamentary elections had served as Deputy Minister of Education for higher and tertiary education. The Deputy Chair is Berdymurad Kurbanov, previously unknown to Post. PAO hoped to learn more about the committee's plans for legal reform within the broad mandate given by President Berdimuhamedov for the Mejlis to "create a new legislative basis for the society and economy." In particular, a new law on education had been planned for introduction in May 2009, but this appears to be delayed.

THE NEW MEJLIS IN THE BIG PICTURE

¶4. (U) Chairman Gubanov first outlined how the 124-member Mejlis has five committees with five permanent Mejlis members each. Other, non-permanent members are resident in their home districts and serve as liaisons between their constituencies and the Mejlis. Aside from the committee he chairs, Gubanov noted the committees on Human Rights and Democracy, Economy and Social Policy, International and Inter-Parliamentary Relations, and Local Governance.

¶5. (SBU) Further Gubanov explained how his committee and others participated in working groups with relevant ministries or state organizations in order to develop new laws that would meet the President's broad mandate to reform multiple areas. He noted that discussion in the working groups was open, and even at times heated due to the frank exchange of ideas which characterizes their work. He also emphasized that the committee used many resources including

the Internet to research approaches to legal reform. With this in mind, he noted his willingness to receive more information or materials from the U.S. Embassy.

#### ON EDUCATION

¶6. (U) Gubanov noted that he and his colleagues continued to consider which educational model to adopt in Turkmenistan and that there were many reasons to consider the Bologna process or other models. Without providing any additional detail, he simply noted that like Russia, they would take their time to make a careful decision.

¶7. (U) One of their current tasks, among many, is to reform the 1993 Law on Education in order to provide for professional, adult education to enable citizens to work in second or new careers, as well as provide secondary vocational or professional schooling. He also noted an emphasis on making the establishment of private schools possible. He showed a sincere interest in learning more about educational programs in the United States, such as evening programs, distance learning, and community colleges.

#### OTHER REFORM TASKS

¶8. (U) Gubanov also noted that his committee is working on other legal reform or initiatives including Laws on Culture, on Protection of the Ozone Layer, on Quarantine of Plants, on Tourism (which he noted should help generate tourism revenue for the country), on Sports and Physical Education.

#### OPENNESS TO AMERICAN INFORMATION/EXPERTISE

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¶9. (U) PAO used the meeting to explain the Open World Program, and the proposed trip for four Mejlis members dealing with education and science to visit the United States in October. Although the program is waiting official approval and nominations via a proposal sent by diplomatic note, Gubanov and his deputy both expressed an interest in this program. However, a lengthy and bureaucratic process will determine who from the Mejlis is actually nominated for participation. Towards the end of the meeting, Gubanov again expressed his appreciation for U.S. Embassy support and his openness to American information and expertise. He also mentioned that they could use materials on leadership skills for use on youth policy. The Public Affairs Section will find and provide appropriate material.

¶10. (SBU) PAO also mentioned a couple of problematic areas in the current Education law, that the hoped the Committee could address: There is no legal provision for current students or professors to participate in exchange programs. Students must withdraw from their academic programs before joining an exchange.

¶11. (SBU) COMMENT: Prior to assuming his position, Vladimir Gubanov was one of the best contacts that Post had in the Ministry of Education, until he left to become a Mejlis member. His new position will hopefully yield a greater influence on the legal basis for cooperation in education and exchange programs. However, the committee that Gubanov heads, consisting of five members only, has such a massive portfolio that it is unclear if they can meet the President's expectations. Gubanov already is well informed about many U.S. Government programs and recognizes their value for Turkmenistan's long-term development. Post hopes that Gubanov will be selected by the government for the Open World program in October.  
END COMMENT.

MILES